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C O N F I D E N T I A L RANGOON 001534

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SUBJECT: RELEASED NLD OFFICIAL BACK ON THE JOB

REF: RANGOON 1518

Classified By: COM Carmen Martinez for Reasons 1.5 (B,D)

11. (C) Summary: Senior NLD leader U Nyunt Wei, newly released from house arrest, says his pro-democracy party will refuse to participate in the regime's reconvened National Convention. He expressed surprise at his own release and pondered whether ASSK and other CEC members might also get a surprise release. The freed NLD "Uncles" will soon feel pressure from the party's rank and file to take action in the face of SPDC plans to enact a new constitution. End Summary.

12. (C) On November 25 we called on U Nyunt Wei, the NLD's Harvard-trained senior economist and a member of the party's nine-person Central Executive Committee (CEC). The SPDC released U Nyunt Wei and four of his CEC colleagues on November 23-24, after more than five months of house arrest (reftel). The 77 year-old party activist, and Member of Parliament-elect, is in good health and says he is well rested after months of reading books on Buddhism and following political developments via BBC and VOA short-wave radio broadcasts.

13. (C) U Nyunt Wei says that he has no idea why the regime decided to release him and other CEC members at this time. He had mentally prepared himself to spend several years under house arrest while the SPDC proceeded with a National Convention and new elections. He intimated that he expects the regime will keep ASSK and other CEC members isolated, but noted that "maybe the authorities will surprise them, like they did me." He offered that the SPDC may have released some CEC members now because "we are old men or because they expect us to join the National Convention."

14. (C) Shrugging off his house arrest, U Nyunt Wei described the regime's treatment of NLD leaders as "part of our job description." He called GOB authorities "idiots" for claiming NLD leaders were not under house arrest or were in so-called "protective custody." The feisty NLD official said the regime has the power and confidence to arrest and detain at will and therefore should have no reason to distort their actions. "And yet," U Nyunt Wei lamented, "they perpetuate the Big Lie, much like the Nazis and the Soviets."

15. (C) U Nyunt Wei said he had met earlier with his fellow released CEC members. On this, their second, day of freedom, however, the "Uncles" convened at CEC member U Lun Tin's house because the latter, having suffered a stroke, is physically unable to move about the city. U Nyunt Wei said the CEC members have agreed that they will refuse to participate in the SPDC's reconvened National Convention. "The reasons the NLD walked out in 1995 remain valid," he said, "the SPDC must bring democratic principles and practices to any process that addresses the future of Burma." U Nyunt Wei added that he would be more favorable toward a Constituent Assembly of elected representatives, rather than a sham Convention.

16. (C) Comment: U Nyunt Wei is clearly enjoying his new freedom and observed that he welcomed the odd feeling of being able to depart his modest Rangoon compound and escort us from his gate to our car. Whether he is enjoying being back in the political saddle is less certain. He told us that when his SPDC handler arrived to inform him that house arrest restrictions had been lifted, he joked "My dear general, you don't realize what work you are creating for me." As the regime plows forth toward a new constitution and most of their peers are enjoying retirement, U Nyunt Wei and the other aging NLD "Uncles" will feel considerable pressure from the party's restless rank and file to create a new path forward for the democracy movement. End comment.  
Martinez